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THE ADVOCATE

PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING QUARTERLY ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

INDIANA VOTING ACCESSIBILITY BILLS REINTRODUCED

With the help of his state representative, **Greg Meyer (2005-Indianapolis)** succeeded in having his early voting by persons with disabilities bill, HB 1109, reintroduced this session. The bill passed the House by a 97-0 vote and has been referred to the Senate. If passed, the bill would insure that early voting sites are accessible to people with disabilities and that accessible voting machines will be available at those sites.

Greg has been tirelessly working on this issue for the past 18 months, and this is the second time the bill has been introduced. Last-minute efforts were not enough to keep the bill from being defeated last session, but Greg is optimistic that the bill will be successful this time around. After last session's defeat, Greg filed a complaint with the Secretary of State's office which responded with an opinion stating that the accessibility requirement for polling

places does not extend to early voting sites. Greg has appealed the ruling and is working with the U.S. Department of Justice and Indiana Protection and Advocacy Services who are both monitoring the issue. Greg encourages fellow Partner graduates to contact their legislator and ask them to vote in favor of HB 1109. Greg Meyer can be contacted at gkmmeyer@sbcglobal.net or 317-439-3395.



To receive updates on this bill and other legislation, sign up for the Fifth Freedom Bill Tracker Action Alert at www.fifthfreedom.org.



DEAR PARTNERS,

I hope that everyone had wonderful holidays and that you set becoming a more involved advocate as one of your New Year's resolutions. There are numerous issues for you to get involved in at the local, state and federal level!

I hope you like the new look and feel of the Advocate newsletter. We have also developed an e-mail version which we have already sent to everyone on the e-mail list. If you did not get it, I do not have your e-mail address! Please send it to me at:

pip@gpcpd.org

We would like to encourage Partners to submit articles, advocacy stories and other writings to be featured in future newsletters. So, get out your keyboards and submit something for the April issue.

I hope that everyone has a terrific year!

Sincerely,

Christine Dahlberg
Council Deputy Director

PARTNERS RECRUITMENT NOW UNDERWAY

Keep your eyes open for a good candidate or two for the Partners in Policymaking Class of 2011. This year people can fill out and submit applications on line: www.in.gov/gpcpd, click on the Partners logo and then on the PDF version of the application.

I have enclosed two print copies of the application and four copies of the brochure. We also have several articles that can be printed in local newsletters, made into flyers, or used to e-mail your networks. Copies of the articles and additional copies of the brochure and application are available on request. They can also be

downloaded from the Council website.

In the past most of our best candidates have come from Partner Graduate recommendations—be sure to write your name and contact info on the reference page of applications you distribute if the person applying has your personal recommendation!

Help expand the family; recruit a new Partner today!



PARTNER FINDS OPPORTUNITY WITH AMERICORPS

Jennifer Byerly (2004-Rockport) joined AmeriCorps this fall and was placed with Hancock County Senior Services. As a fulltime AmeriCorps volunteer, Jennifer receives a \$950 per month living stipend and will receive an educational award of \$4,725 at the completion of her year of service. She plans to use her award towards the purchase of a new computer and training course. In 2010, the award will increase to \$5,350 for new volunteers.

Each year, AmeriCorps offers 75,000 opportunities for adults of all ages and backgrounds to

serve through a network of partnerships with local and national nonprofit groups.

AmeriCorps encourages individuals with disabilities to serve but cautions that AmeriCorps benefits may affect a volunteer's Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), or other benefits under the Social Security Act. In Jennifer's case, her living stipend was below the \$980 substantial gainful activity threshold and therefore did not affect her SSDI.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Visit the AmeriCorps homepage at www.americorps.gov or contact the Indiana Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives at www.in.gov/ofbci or (317) 233-4273 for opportunities to serve in Indiana.



EXHIBIT OF ART BY HOOSIERS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

A unique art show called "What's important to me! An exhibit of art by Hoosiers with disabilities" opened this month in Evansville and will be traveling on a year-long tour throughout the state. The exhibit sponsor, IPMG, developed the show to raise awareness about developmental disabilities and to facilitate community integration of individuals with autism, cerebral palsy, and other diagnoses.

Artwork by dozens of individuals from around the state will be on display, including pieces from Partner graduate **Joshua Dickman (2007-Rockport)**. The artists present their skills and talents through a diverse variety of styles, including paintings, pencil sketching, and textile works, which reflect the contributions they

make in their communities and the interests they have in their lives.

"What's important to me!" will be displayed at Central Library in Evansville until February 18. The exhibit will then travel to various cities across the state, including Indianapolis, Terre Haute, and Richmond, with a special stop at the Indiana Statehouse March 1 – 31 in honor of Disabilities Awareness Month. For more information, visit

www.gotoipmg.com



WILL A DOG RUN IN THE INDIANAPOLIS 500 MINI-MARATHON?

After encouragement from her doctor to shed a few pounds, **Kacie Weldy (2009-Brownsburg)** and her husband decided they needed some additional motivation to exercise more and signed up for the 500 Festival Mini-Marathon in Indianapolis this May. This 13.1 mile half marathon is the largest of its kind in the United States, attracting over 40,000 runners and walkers who make their way along a winding course that takes participants from downtown Indianapolis to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and back. When Kacie told race organizers that she would be bringing Rei, her service dog, she was told that animals are not allowed on the course because of safety concerns and she would need to find a sighted guide if she wanted to participate.

After an additional email exchange, race organizers agreed to allow Kacie to bring Rei with a few conditions; the most unacceptable to Kacie being

that her dog remained muzzled during the event.

Instead of being discouraged, Kacie became even more committed that she and her dog would participate. She continued training with Rei, and reached out to fellow Partners Gary Johnson and Greg Meyer to help develop a strategy to resolve the access issue. Kacie and her team contacted the mayor's office, the marathon's primary sponsor, and race officials to inform them of the situation and to educate them on the applicable provisions of ADA and state law.

Kacie is waiting on a resolution and is hopeful that she will reach a mutual agreement soon.

To receive email updates on this and other stories, along with news and event information, send your email address to: pip@gpcpd.org



FOLLOW KACIE'S PROGRESS ON HER BLOG!
HEARNOEVIL-SEENOEVIL.BLOGSPOT.COM

FREE APRIL CONFERENCE IN DC TO ADVOCATE FOR REHAB EQUIPMENT

Gary Johnson (2009-Huntington) encourages Partner graduates who use power wheelchairs and other complex rehab equipment and are interested in changing federal reimbursement policy to attend the National Registry of Rehabilitation Technology Suppliers Legislative Advocacy Conference in DC April 28-30. Gary comments, "This is an expense paid trip to Washington, DC where you can tell your story in person to mem-

bers of Congress on Capitol Hill. Your involvement will help change the government's perspective for you and others with disabilities."

Individuals can apply for a Consumer Scholarship to the CELA Conference by visiting www.nrrts.org or calling 800-976-7787 to request your application for scholarship.

PARTNER WINS CASE AGAINST ABUSIVE TEACHER

By Mary Leiber (2004-Indianapolis)

My 22 year old son has multiple disabilities and is mostly nonverbal. In August of 2008, I received a phone call that made being a Partners in Policy-making Graduate invaluable.

It was August 15 and my son had just gotten off the bus from school when the phone rang. It was the administration from the school for children with disabilities my son had attended since he was 4 years old. They were calling me to tell me that my son had been "struck" in the face at school that morning around 10am. They would not tell me who "struck" him or release their report of the incident to me. I immediately called 911 and Adult Protective Services. It took nearly 2 weeks of being persistent to find out that it happened more than once, it had been a teacher, and a newly hired teacher's aide had reported it. What was even more disturbing was that this man had been my son's teacher the year before and even though I do not have proof, I am positive that he hit my son the year before as well.

I hired an education lawyer and a personal injury lawyer immediately and filed charges against the teacher. It took a lot of persistence and investigation on my part to make sure that he suffered the fullest extent of the law. I wrote letters to judges, prosecutors, Indiana Board of Education, I called former teacher's aides, people he worked with, whatever it took. Throughout my investigation of him, I had found out that he had abused another person at a group home and only suffered a suspension from his job, before the school my child attended hired him!



Finally after 15 months of court dates, in November 2009, he took a plea bargain. He would not serve any jail time, but he would have to surrender his teaching license and admit to striking my son. While I am glad that he will never be able to hurt another child in a classroom again, his life will go on as normal; while my family is still trying to pick up the pieces.

We all need to come together and work to change the laws in Indiana when it comes to teachers and caregivers. We need to demand federal background checks before hiring teachers and if they are caught abusing students or people in their care, we need to make sure there are tougher laws in place to protect the abused, not the teachers or caregivers. Together with our training from PIP we can make this happen!

MARCH IS DISABILITY AWARENESS MONTH!

From putting up posters at your place of work or school or passing out coloring books at Sunday school to putting on a full blown community disability fair, March is a great time to work with others to spread the word about disability awareness. We have a great new poster and lots of materials that can be downloaded including this year's artwork, children's coloring books and planning packets with lots of ideas for activities.

While we consider March as the kickoff, activities can and should be done any time of the year! If you have misplaced your order form you can download one from the Council website or contact the Council at bwade@gpcpd.org or 317-232-4551 to request a copy.

While we are out of bookmarks and stickers we have lots of posters and can send you bookmarks and stickers from other years if requested. To download materials visit:

<http://indianadisabilityawareness.org>



The Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities is an independent state agency that facilitates change.

Our mission is to advance independence, productivity, and inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspect of society

This mission is accomplished through planning, evaluation, collaboration, education, research and advocacy.



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IN MEMORIAM: THREE PARTNER GRADUATES

Joni Rae McKenzie, 54, December 12, Indianapolis, Class of 1992

After graduating from the first class of partners in Policymaking, Joni decided to become a full-time advocate for people with disabilities. That same year she went to Washington D.C. and spoke before a U.S. Senate Sub-Committee regarding work incentives for people with disabilities like her. Some of the organizations she worked with were the Governor's Council for People with Disabilities, Back Home in Indiana, United Cerebral Palsy Association of Greater Indiana, and the Family Support Council.



Jodi James, 38, September 5, Michigan City, Class of 1999

Jodi was the Disability Services Coordinator for Purdue North Central and served on their ADA Committee. She believed in the "helping hand" philosophy in assisting students with disabilities to learn how to do for themselves. She kept up to date on important issues by her service on various local, regional, and state boards and committees including the Indiana Council of Independent Living, The Commission on Rehabilitation Services and ADAPT (American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today). She was a community leader, well known as an advocate in north central Indiana and beyond.

Ken Lefler, 68, September 10, Evansville, Class of 2007

Ken was an active Red Cross volunteer who provided training to over 1,200 people as a CPR, First Aid, and AED instructor. He worked many hours on the telephone during disasters including the southern Indiana tornado and the 2008 ice storm and received the Southwestern Indiana Red Cross Health & Safety Volunteer of the Year Award in 2008. In addition to his Red Cross work he advocated for improvements in city accessibility testifying before the Vanderburgh County Board of Commissioners receiving an appointment to serve on the Polling Place Advisory Committee.



PARTNER NEWS AND NOTES

John Ellinger (1995-Middlebury), Angie Ehlers (2006-Bloomington), Melody Cooper (2003-Indianapolis), and Betty Williams (1992-Richmond) were recently elected to the Self Advocates of Indiana board.

The Indiana Coalition for Mental Health and the Indianapolis Bipolar Parents websites have merged. **Jamie Perkins (2006-Indianapolis)** remarked, "We hope that this change will provide more of a 'one stop online shop' for information and resources to youth, caregivers and professionals." Update your bookmarks to <http://www.indplsbpparents.org>

Christine Guth (2009-Goshen) received the Autism Society of Indiana's award for excellence in family support. She has also been working hard to establish a Club House project for people with mental illness in Elkhart County. A group has formed to work on the project and six articles have appeared in the newspaper. Christine and another member are "clubhouse story tellers" and speak to groups about their efforts. For more info go to: <http://ec-clubhouse.adnetonline.org>

Karen Vaughn (1992-Indianapolis) and Amy Borgmann (2001-Greenfield) were honored with Distinguished Leadership Awards at the Community Spirit Awards luncheon in November.

Doug Hughes (1993-Indianapolis) and his wife Mary were the subject of a TV story in December that focused on people with disabilities giving back through volunteering. Doug spends one day a week at an elementary school working with children and was appointed as a member of the Community Residential Facilities Council.

Laura Hoffman (2009-Lawrenceburg) is the volunteer state coordinator for NOEWAIT, a national organization working to raise awareness of the over 300,000 individuals with disabilities on waitlists and the lack of portability nationally. For more information or to sign a petition: <http://www.noewait.net>

Claudia Burrows (1993-Muncie) was featured in the AARP bulletin and on Channel 6 (Indianapolis) regarding technology that could save Medicare and Medicaid dollars by using iPods and iPhones instead of expensive and bulky communication devices costing thousands.

Cindy Calley (2007-Indianapolis) was quoted in an Indianapolis Star article in August. She is collecting stories of people who have no or inadequate health care coverage to emphasize the need for health care reform.

Jason Peppers (2005-New Albany) is enrolled at Ivy Tech in Sellersburg. He has completed 36 hours so far and says its a great place to go for students with disabilities.

Rahnee Patrick (1996-Chicago) was featured on a new public service announcement for the American Association of People with Disabilities which was displayed on the CBS jumbo screen in New York's Times Square through the month of November. To see the PSA, visit <http://tiny.cc/hJAMK>

Don Counts (2002-Evansville) helped set up and staff a booth for the Evansville Vanderburgh County Advisory Board for People With Disabilities at Family Day in the Park in Evansville. The booth provided information on what to do if you face discrimination.



Dee Wheat (2006-West Baden Springs) sent in this picture of the wheelchair ramp at the "new town hall that West Baden Springs is so proud of. What they WON'T say is that they don't bother to salt or shovel the snow/ice off it."